WGA
WHERE GRACE ABOUNDS

COLORADANS WILL DECIDE IN NOVEMBER (August, 1992, WGA Newsletter)

Amendment 2, a ballot proposal known by the short title "No Special Rights," will be voted on by Coloradans at the polls in November. The amendment states that giving gay, lesbian or bisexual people protection from civil rights violations based on their sexual orientation is tantamount to giving them special rights above those of other citizens. If passed, it would bar such laws from being passed anywhere in Colorado and would wipe existing local ordinances off the books in Denver, Boulder and Aspen.

The amendment, and its supporters' and detractors' comments, are bandied about almost daily in the Denver papers and on television. Yet, despite the high media profile of gay rights activists and their opponents, it is persistently troublesome to me that there has been little concrete information presented. Instead of parroting the propaganda of extreme positions, I wish the journalists would explore and write about these issues in depth. Reporting the accusations of opposing special interest groups only serves to stir up already volatile emotions. Also, it leads to further polarization of people who desperately need to hear and understand one another.

The issues are complex. There are no simple solutions to political and moral issues which have been with us for generations. Passing laws won't fix the problem, but neither will defeating the bill.

"So, then," you might ask, "why even bother to address the issue?"

Well, I don't very often. I have been in full-time ministry to people with a homosexual struggle for seven years now, and I have been unwilling to become caught up in the politics of the gay rights movement and its opponents. Furthermore, I remain unwilling to mandate an official WGA position; nor will I try to convince people of the way they should vote or what their convictions should be.

Nevertheless, I do believe that, with the privilege to influence our environment though our choices at the polls, as citizens, we are responsible to think through the difficult issues that face our country: to fast and pray for wisdom and a radical love that won't compromise truth, or water down grace; and to place an educated vote according to our individual consciences. Call it idealism if you wish, but I believe that if every citizen went through just such a process, our country would look a great deal more like the kingdom of God than it does.

It occurs to me that, as I have been involved in ministry to people who are directly affected by the issues before us, I have gained some insight that might be of help to those of you who are trying to get a handle on the real issues enough to vote intelligently. If what I have experienced in my own search for the truth can be of help in your process of "reasoning together" with God, then I am glad to offer what I can.

In the next two newsletters, I intend to present to you factors to consider regarding the initiative which will be on the ballot in November. Please pray that I will allow the Holy Spirit to search my heart and mind, and bring forth the heart of the matter as He sees it.

HOW, THEN, SHALL WE VOTE? (September, 1992, WGA Newsletter)

The Issue: Amendment 2, a ballot initiative which will be presented to Colorado voters in November, and, if approved, will amend our state's constitution to prohibit protected status based on sexual orientation. It will nullify all existing state and local laws giving homosexuals special status, while making it unconstitutional for municipalities to pass any future "gay rights" legislation.

Proponents: Individuals and groups like Colorado for Family Values (CFV), self-defined as a "coalition of concerned citizens," believe that militant homosexual and lesbian activists and their supporters are actively seeking to force society to condone, and the state to sanction, homosexual behaviors and lifestyles. CFV and its supporters believe that the passing Amendment 2 will put a stop to a movement they perceive is legislating immorality.

Opponents: Individuals and groups in opposition to Amendment 2 are gathering forces under the leadership of EPOColorado (EPOC), a group which is actively working for what they call "equal protection for gays, lesbians and bi-sexuals." Their organization believes that homosexual people have been discriminated against because of their sexual orientation. It is, therefore, their conviction that homosexual people deserve to be given civil rights status. They perceive Amendment 2 to be an attempt to legalize discrimination based on sexual orientation.

The Battle: My description of the battle so far may seem simplistic, but I believe it portrays the basics. Both CFV and EPOC have drawn up position papers. These may be obtained from their offices; addresses follow this article. Both groups speak publicly, asserting the rightness of their cause and the wrongness of their opponents' views. The media then takes these opposing views and rehashes them in articles about sex education in the schools, discrimination against homosexuals in the military, Boy Scouts, adoptions, etc., so we hear, almost daily, the same arguments in the same words. Both "sides" of the debate are properly outraged by the tactics of their opponents. It reminds me of a game my sister and I would get into: whoever has the last word wins; or a variation on the game, whoever shouts the loudest, or lasts the longest, wins.

Perceptions: Yet, it's hard to see how anyone is going to win. What is there to win? If CFV "wins," thousands of homosexual people will believe, rightly or wrongly, that they have been rejected and seen as something from which society wants protection. If EPOC "wins," we are left with a problem: civil rights protection and, therefore, mandatory acceptance of homosexuality, which is considered immoral by many citizens.

I've long held the belief that you cannot legislate morality, thus I have left the debate over moral issues to the church and the individual's responsibility. It is true, however, that in the absence of dissenting voice, immorality has its way. Our society and its government agencies, including our education system, have drifted far from their Judeo/Christian roots, not into the neutral pluralistic utopia idealists and I dreamed of for years, but into its present state of "anything goes."

Anything goes, except, of course, the voices of those who believe the Bible is authoritative, and who speak their minds, naming, according to their convictions, what is good and standing against evil. These, who we might call prophets, then become voices crying out in a wilderness of contempt for them and their "repressive" beliefs. It appears the only intolerance an American "should" tolerate is the intolerance of intolerance.

I recently heard Chuck Colson talk about this idea on his program "Breakpoint." He was addressing the question, "How did we get to this state of affairs, where citizens take political positions protecting immoral behaviors rather than vote for what is right?" His conclusion was that tolerance is the American god. Colson said that, even when the behavior in question is generally agreed to be destructive to society, when it comes to a choice between tolerance and intolerance, Americans bow down and worship the god of tolerance.

As I think and pray about these things, I find myself an advocate of tolerance unless doing so compromises my values; and I'm an advocate of speaking the truth, unless it is being spoken without love. As a result, I find myself agreeing and disagreeing with CFV and EPOC. I agree with CFV that sexuality is not a matter of civil rights and should therefore not be addressed in the form of civil rights legislation. According to existing Supreme Court criteria, homosexuality does not qualify for minority status. If Amendment 2 passes, it will bring the Colorado constitution into agreement with the U.S. Supreme Court, and has the potential to end the battle over gay rights in local governments and bring it into a broader arena where it can be decided upon nationally. I also am in support of CFV's right to petition the government on behalf of their cause, and am distressed that they have been held in contempt and openly ridiculed by the media as well as their opponents.

Yet, the "gay rights" activists have legitimate concerns. For instance, homosexual people have lost jobs and been refused a place to live simply because they are homosexual. Think for a moment how life might be for you if your particular besetting sin could cost you your job or apartment. One young man in one of our support groups left an excellent job when he could no longer bear continual harassment from his co-workers because of his homosexuality. Was he behaving homosexually and offending people at work? No, he shared with a supervisor about his "problem with homosexuality" and the word got out. What recourse does he have against such unfair treatment?

Another valid point made by the opponents of Amendment 2, is that they have the same rights as any other citizen to petition the government on any level. They see Amendment 2 as singling them out as a people group which must not be allowed a voice in our government. Whether we agree with their values or not, we must remember that they are fellow Americans, and deserve our consideration as such.

Even as I affirm points from both positions, however, I also find myself in conflict with both sides. Proponents of Amendment 2 continually discuss homosexuality in terms of the worst case scenario, thereby stirring up fear and disgust against people who are tenderly loved by God as you and I. Then, a look at the tactics of the initiative's opponents will find them shouting epithets and bullying the press and politicians into acquiescence or silence. And, at every opportunity, both sides represent themselves as watchdogs of the American way while accusing each other of Nazi tactics.

So, as Francis Schaeffer asked, "HOW, THEN, SHALL WE LIVE?" More to the immediate point, how, then, shall we vote? As I said last month, I have no intention of telling you how to vote, but I do believe that, as responsible people of God, we must think and pray through on this issue, go to the polls, cast a vote according to our individual consciences, and continue to pray for God's direction for those of us who minister to people with a homosexual orientation.

My mind wearies with the stress of sorting through and evaluating the various arguments. My heart aches with a desire for some other way to settle things. Next month, I will share with you an idea I have for a "better way of settling things." Please keep praying for our state as we move toward facing the homosexual rights issue. "If My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves and pray, then I will hear their prayers...and heal their land." Please intercede with me for the healing of our land.

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A BETTER WAY OF SETTLING THINGS (October, 1992, WGA newsletter)

This column is the third of three. The first introduced the conflict over Amendment 2, an initiative which proposes to make it unconstitutional to pass a law giving "special rights" to gay, lesbian, or bisexual people. The second article identified the proponents and opponents of Amendment 2, along with a few of my thoughts about the ramifications of passage or defeat of the initiative. This month I want to present an idea I have for a better way of settling things.

In May of 1991, I sent a letter outlining this idea to Governor Romer. It expressed my concern over the anti-discrimination ordinance which was coming up for a vote in Denver. Although I received no acknowledgement in 1991, I am sending it a second time. Even if the governor chooses again not to respond, I feel it is important to offer what I can, then leave the rest to God. If you like my suggestions, you might send the enclosed letter to the governor. Include your own thoughts and suggestions, letting him know of your concern. In any case, please continue to pray with me that the Holy Spirit will move mightily, even through our political processes, and heal our land.

With a few modifications, I present to you my letter, enclosed with this newsletter.

(The letter to Governor Romer has been attached to this handout.)

THE AFTERMATH (December, 1992, WGA Newsletter)

"Colorado's debate over Amendment 2 was inflamed rather than settled by the 53 percent election victory of the measure, and boycott hysteria now has widened the controversy to national proportions" (John Andrews, "What's next in the battle over the anti-gay rights amendment?", Rocky Mountain News, November 29, 1992, page 1D).

During a WGA presentation at a local Sunday School, I was recently asked, "What are the pluses and minuses of the passage of Amendment 2?" The question captured the concern of many Coloradans

trying to make sense of the aftermath of the election. The silence was heavy as I tried to formulate a two minute reply to a question I couldn't answer adequately if I had an hour. My response only confirmed some worst fears, that the battle over gay rights is not only not settled, but is, in fact, intensifying. I find it difficult to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the passage of Amendment 2. My present mindset reminds me of a poster I saw once that was captioned, "It's hard to remember that your objective is to drain the swamp when you're up to your [neck] in alligators." I'm up to my neck in the fallout from the Amendment 2 explosion.

Alligators notwithstanding, my objective in the writing of this article is to offer a few of my thoughts and experiences of the past few weeks. It is my hope that in so doing you will be encouraged and even helped as you continue to pray and seek God's solution for the problems we face in our state and nation.

In the days immediately following the election, the subject was being discussed everywhere I went. I was in a local restaurant and overheard a conversation at the table next to mine. The people were obviously co-workers and they were talking about the reaction of gay and lesbian demonstrators the night of the election. One woman said, "I voted against the amendment, but after seeing the activists' behavior I wonder if I made a mistake. They seem to be reinforcing their own stereotypes, and I was embarrassed for them." Two of her companions jumped in quickly speaking at once, with comments that indicated their disagreement with her. One of them said, "Well, how would you feel if you just found out that more than half of the state of Colorado hates you?" The discussion became more & more heated and less & less rational as they argued.

During a WGA prayer meeting, one staff member told us that one of his supporters overheard a co-worker in the lunch room say, "For heaven's sake, they (the gay activists) acted like a bunch of kids that someone said 'No,' to." Another staff person reported that she was accused by some pro-gay activists of belonging to a "fascist, anti-gay hate group."

A sign in the window of a restaurant in Capitol Hill read, "Colorado has institutionalized discrimination in its constitution. SHAME!! THIS SHALL NOT STAND." Bumper stickers materialized which read, "Down with Amendment 2 in 94."

WGA phones were even more active than usual. One of our group members works as a marketing rep for a company that routinely call young adults to invite them to participate in their music program. He reported that when he made a call the day after the election he was told, "I don't want anything to do with you Christians. You're mean." A WGA supporter called to ask how to respond to people at work who know she's a Christian and seem to be angry with her for the "institutionalized discrimination that you people are perpetrating on gays and lesbians." Pastors and lay people from churches that have not been previously interested in hearing about ministry to homosexual people called and wanted us to come talk in their churches. The prevailing question seems to be "How can we get the message out that we don't hate homosexuals?"

How, indeed? What are the pros and cons of the passage of Amendment 2? Certainly there are many, and space prevents a full analysis, but I offer a few of my thoughts.

ADVANTAGES:

People are certainly talking more about homosexuality and its various effects on the society and individual. It has long been a frustration to me that many people, both religious and secular have ignored the issue. I'm glad for the heightened awareness resulting from the gay rights debate.

Homosexuality has been brought anew into the national arena, where experts in the field, and sophisticated means of research and apologetics can be tapped. It is my conviction that a search for truth is nothing to be feared; moreover it seems to me that such a search is best done in the national arena, relatively free from the emotionalism which often characterizes local battles.

DISADVANTAGES:

People on both sides of the gay rights debate are further polarized, and the possibility of their having rational discussions is diminished. It was reported to me that one lesbian said, "How would you like it if a million and a half people wished you bodily harm?" This woman represents a

large number of people who believe, rightly or wrongly, that they are hated by "anti-gay bigots." It seems that the opportunity God's people have to minister His love is seriously hampered by the false belief that Christians hate homosexuals.

Regardless of whether the media may have not have been fair in its representation of the debate over gay rights, it cannot be argued that there were people who did not fight the battle with spiritual weapons of love and a prayerful attitude. Instead some Christians resorted to muck-raking and other weapons of the world in order to influence people. As a result, a few of those who fought for Amendment 2 have a partially deserved reputation for stirring up hate and fear. The entire Christian community now has that reputation to bear whether or not we supported such tactics or even the amendment itself.

Fortunately, when all is said and done, the advantages and disadvantages discussed, it is comforting to return to the knowledge of God's sovereignty. He is still on His throne. He still has a plan, a plan for good and not for evil. If we will repent over our deserved reputation, come to Him in grief over the undeserved persecution, and pray for our land, He has promised to heal it. Let us persevere in doing just that - praying, and loving people in His name. We can trust Him to guide us through the wilderness of gay rights debates even as He led the Israelites through the desert. Let's hope it doesn't take forty years.

*The above articles were taken from the **Where Grace Abounds** monthly newsletter. If you would like to receive the newsletter, please contact **Where Grace Abounds**. Mary Heathman is the director of **Where Grace Abounds**, P.O. Box 18871, Denver, CO 80218, (303)322-2027. This ministry is reaching out in the love of Jesus Christ without condemnation, yet without compromising the Word of God. **Where Grace Abounds** provides godly counsel, support and encouragement while allowing the Holy Spirit to do a sanctification work in the life of any individual.*